

Passages on the “Non-Euclidean” from *The Agony of Power* by Jean Baudrillard: [Link](#)

Passage 1

New challenges, new context. However, the general atmosphere surrounding this new era, this new configuration is the obsolescence of humanity and its values.

- Obsolescence of Reason and the Enlightenment.
- Obsolescence of Universals and ideologies.
- Obsolescence of History and work.
- Obsolescence of desire and imagination.
- Obsolescence of the individual.
- Obsolescence of the Other.
- Obsolescence of reality.
- Obsolescence of death.

In fact, to describe this anthropological break, where all old values are obsolete and where all events take on another meaning, we would have to introduce the idea of a non-Euclidean space-the space of hegemonic world power, with its unprecedented machinery, but also the space of another type of events-events of another order than historical events-unpredictable events, without continuity or reference-and which are the radical sign of a counter-power at work.

The obsolescence of History opens a space where everything that was historical or political including revolutions-has become "fake." All current political events, including the most violent ones, are made up of these fake-events, these post-events, which bear witness to a bygone history that is only the shadow of itself. In France, we see it today in melodramatic fashion. But the obsolescence of history and the political stage brings emerging events at the same time, events that I would call, by analogy with rogue states, rogue events-witnesses to the impossible revolution. The only impossible revolution, says Ceronetti in substance, one that is even inconceivable to reason, would be the revolution against machines-and this impossibility turns all other revolutions into a schizophrenic farce.

However, there are now traces of this impossible revolution in the (potentially terrorist) sequence of rogue events in the new non-Euclidean space. Everything that was on the order of the negative and the

work of the negative has now become parody-a counter-copy or transfer of the overall process. There is no return on that side. The critical threshold has been reached; there is no possibility of returning to Canetti's blind spot-no nostalgic transference of the situation. We are in a different space, the non-Euclidean space of power-a chaotic, stochastic, exponential, catastrophic and fractal universe of outsized effects (metalepsy) , of the reversal of causality and reality.

BUT: if this non-Euclidean universe is now the universe of power, it has also become the universe of counter-power. This reversion is much more radical than a negation; the antagonism is capable of turning the weapons of this new power against it, and especially of turning the weapons of power against themselves.

The rules of hegemony are turned against it, through a force that contests it radically, in accordance with its own principles (and not only, like Marx in his time, according to historical contradictions while implicitly remaining faithful to the principle of reality and economic principles-to which his theory ends up succumbing). That is why this is not a historical revolution but a kind of anthropological mutation, and while there is no revolution thinkable in the context of the current hegemonic power, there is nothing beyond this "non-Euclidean" counter-power.

An astounding illustration of this non-Euclidean space is September 11, which itself was an archetypal rogue event.

In the events of September 11, the most terrifying aspect was not the material destruction of the twin towers but the passage into something which, while inconceivable as reality (you can't believe your eyes, it's impossible), is not fiction at all. This fiction (from disaster movies, etc.) is part of our immune system; it protects us from reality by means of its double imaginary. It absorbs our fantasies. And the attack made our fantasies real like a dream, like fulfilling a desire. Indeed, it was literally unlivable and the terror was there, in the inconceivable passage into reality-or rather in something that goes far beyond the real.

The real only exists to the extent that we can intervene in it. But when something emerges that we cannot change in any way, even with the imagination, something that escapes all representation, then it simply expels us.

In the collapse of the two towers, as opposed to the ordinary destruction of bombardment, where horizontal territory is struck from a vertical position, here the vertical dimension was struck head-on by the horizontal. A subversion of the usual orthogonal space-it is another topology-prefigured by the verticality of the towers, which was very different than the Empire State Building, for example. The Empire State Building still represented the Promethean verticality of capital and wealth, of rivalry and domination. The Twin Towers, however, precisely because they were twins-which did not happen by chance-could only be measured against themselves: they mirrored each other in their self-referentiality.

Their homotopy sealed the perfection of power that was no longer Promethean-I would call it Ouroborean, in the sense that it is enclosed in itself and defines a seamless (and windowless) hyperspace. We can wonder what would have happened if only one of them fell. Impossible. The death of one could only lead to the death of the other, by symbolic contamination. It was just as impossible to destroy them by a bomb in the basement, using the normal topology (the 1996 attack was a failure), for technical reasons, of course, but especially because they did not belong to that space (by analogy with hegemony, which cannot be fought in the traditional space of relationships of force and violence, because it no longer belongs to that space).

They had to be crashed into and made to implode (not explode) in their own space. The masterstroke of the terrorists was to find a riposte beyond traditional confrontations, in this new extraterritorial dimension, a riposte equal to this new power. It is a new virtual power, in the sense in which it reigns and moves about in a space without reference, except to itself (An exponential power in the sense in which it is not measured by accumulation or ordinary verticality, but by an orbital structure that escapes determination "on the ground" and the constraints of reality. This orbital and exorbitant form is the very form of hegemonic power and it can only be fought with other rules that come from radical alterity.

People were amazed by the poverty of the means used to obtain such a maximal result in this attack. But this new space is also the space of symbolic acts; it leads to chaotic, eccentric effects, effects with no common measure with the causes and effects of Euclidean space.

The extreme originality of this symbolic act was not only to pervert the most evolved technology by outflanking it, but to guess the possibilities of a different strategic space. It was no longer a head-on conflict-all frontal oppositions are caught despite themselves in a diabolic curve-but a true asymmetric conflict that implied, beyond relationships of force, a change in the rules of the game. A duel, with its

oblique impact, that has all the characteristics of a martial art (of detour, of failure of the other and the diversion of its energy) and that is now traversing and destabilizing the entire political or geopolitical universe of globalization.

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Passage 2

A prime example of these rogue-events, which are both farcical and terrifying, is the recent bird flu scare (where the terrorists were wild ducks!).

There is no greater masquerade than this global panic, than the sacred union in panic. The international community becomes hectic and epileptic from the virus of terror and the terror of viruses. Terror is multiplied by the grotesque profusion of security measures that end up causing perverse autoimmune effects: the antibodies turn against the body and cause more damage than the virus. Without real solidarity between nations, the specter of Absolute Evil must be raised up as an ersatz Universal, an emergency solution to symbolic misery. When traditional contracts and symbolic pacts, the universal and the particular no longer function, a form like a conspiracy takes brutal shape, a plot in which everyone is involuntarily involved. Partaking in the conspiracy is not based on anything, on any value, other than delirious self-defense, in response to the total loss of the imaginary's immunity . . . In fact, the virus is a "cosa mentale" and contamination happens so quickly because the mental immunity, the symbolic defenses are long lost. A panic space can take hold in this liquidation, one to which the entire global information system also belongs for another reason, the system of networks and instant diffusion-a non-Euclidean space where all rational, preventive, prophylactic countermeasures are almost automatically turned against themselves through their own excesses. Security is the best medium for terror.

Yet we should also examine the conditions for the emergence of this virus and the sources of these new pathologies-not only in the animal world but in human society in general . . . One might guess that they are the result of confinement, promiscuity, concentration and monstrous overexploitation. The inevitable sequels of industrial processes. There is no difference between animal and human environments: the same conditions produce the same viral and infectious anomalies.

If we take for example the ingestion of bone meal leading to mad cow disease, there is a form of deregulation here, an incestuous confusion that it would be absurd to attempt to resolve by excess control and concentration-camp measures (the best solution found to fight the bird flu was sequestering animals and vaccinating migratory birds!).

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